

RUSSIAN EMPIRE-BUILDING AND THE KAZAKH KINSHIP SYSTEM:
THE CHALA-QAZAQS OF THE KAZAKH STEPPE

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ABSTRACT

Nurlan Kabdylkhak: Russian Empire-Building and the Kazakh Kinship System: The Chala-Qazaqs of the Kazakh steppe
(under the direction of Eren Tasar)

This thesis examines the phenomenon of Chala-Qazaqs: groups of mixed ethnic origin who lived in the Kazakh steppe. Chala-Qazaqs, or “half-Kazakhs,” emerged as a result of the rigid kinship system and patrilineal succession adopted by the steppe nomads. Since Kazakhs inherited their tribal identities from their fathers, they placed the progeny of Kazakh mothers and non-Kazakh fathers in the hybrid category of Chala-Qazaqs. Chala-Qazaq could serve as a transitional status on the way to becoming “fully” Kazakh. This “Kazakhification” was evinced by their incorporation into Kazakh tribal genealogies. This paper reveals that this process stopped in the nineteenth century due to the transformation of the Kazakh kinship system and the emergence of Chala-Qazaqs as a distinct social category – two inter-related shifts connected to Russian imperial expansion. Chala-Qazaqs present a fascinating case that exposes ethnic processes in pre-colonial and colonial settings and demonstrate the agency of Muslims under the Russian rule.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: EARLY CHALAS: SARTS INTO KAZAKHS	5
CHAPTER 2: RUSSIAN EXPANSION INTO THE EAST KAZAKH STEPPE	9
CHAPTER 3: CHALA-QAZAQ AS A DISTINCT CATEGORY	12
CHAPTER 4: CHALA-QAZAQ POPULATION OF THE EAST KAZAKH STEPPE	27
CONCLUSION	32

INTRODUCTION

According to a Naiman legend, sometime in the early 1600s, a man named Toqtar-Khoja came to the Kazakh steppe from Turkistan¹ and settled among the Naimans, a major Kazakh tribe that traditionally populated the East Kazakh steppe. He married a local tribal ruler's daughter, Maqta, with whom he had two sons. When Toqtar-Khoja grew old, he decided to return to his ancestral lands. He left for Turkistan with his younger son, while his first-born son, Bai-Jigit, remained with his mother and his maternal relatives in the Kazakh steppe. Toqtar-Khoja was not a Kazakh, and, due to the rigid kinship system and patrilineal succession practiced by the steppe nomads, Naimans regarded his children as Chala-Qazaqs (half-way or partial Kazakhs).² However, within a century Toqtar-Khoja's numerous progeny became integrated into the Naiman genealogy through his wife Maqta. Today his descendants constitute a major line of Naiman Kazakhs, known as the Bai-Jigits, who live mostly in eastern Kazakhstan. The "Kazakhification" of the Bai-Jigits demonstrates how the status of a Chala-Qazaq could serve as a transition on the way to becoming "fully" Kazakh. This process, however, stopped in the nineteenth century due to the transformation of the Kazakh kinship system and the emergence of Chala-Qazaqs as a distinct social category – two inter-

¹ Historically, the term Turkistan was applied to southern Central Asia (also known to the local population as Western Turkistan) and what is today Chinese Xinjiang (known as Eastern Turkistan). It is also the name of a city in what is today southern Kazakhstan that was a major Central Asian religious and political center in the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. In the story's context "Turkistan" probably refers to the region rather than the city.

² Nineteenth and early twentieth-century sources in Kazakh, Tatar, and Persian use the terms چالا قازاق or چالا قازاق; both can be transliterated into English as "Chala-Qazaq." In fact, the term "Qazaq" better reflects the way Kazakhs themselves pronounce and write their name in the Kazakh language, which before the 1920s used the Arabic script, but currently utilizes the Cyrillic alphabet. The English term "Kazakh" is a transliteration from the Russian language.

related shifts which, I argue, were consequences of Russian imperial expansion into the Kazakh steppe.

Prior to the nineteenth century, Kazakhs already had a strong sense of communal identity. At the core of this “Kazakhness” rested the Kazakh kinship system.³ However, this system was not just a source of ethnic identification. A tribal affiliation was an essential factor for one’s survival in the nomadic pastoralist economy of the steppe. Clans and families inherited common grazing rights to pasture lands and migration routes from their tribes. In addition, tribe members provided support for their impoverished members in times of environmental instability, and protection against enemies in times of conflict. If a Kazakh family was big enough to form a separate nomadizing unit (*awl*), it could detach itself from the tribe and in time develop into a distinct line while still preserving its affiliation to the main tribe. Kazakhs recognized all those with a tribal affiliation as Kazakhs, while all individuals and families outside of the tribal system were considered non-Kazakhs.⁴ As steppe nomads inherited their tribal identity from their fathers, those who were born from a Kazakh mother and a non-Kazakh father could not be regarded as “fully” Kazakh. Instead, they were placed in the hybrid category of Chala-Qazaqs.⁵

³ Nineteenth-century Kazakh authors imagined Kazakhs as a single ethnic group with one language, culture, and religion. These authors varied in their accounts about the origin of Kazakhs. Most of these narratives featured a common ancestor of all Kazakhs, though, some also recognized the diverse origin of Kazakh tribes. However, all of them treated an affiliation to a Kazakh tribe as a defining characteristic of belonging to Kazakhs. See for instance Shahkarim Khudaiberdi-ogli, *Türk, Qırghız, Qazaq ham Khanlar Şajarası* (Orenburg: Karimov, Khusainov wa Shirkasi, 1911); Qurban-’Ali Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* (Kazan: Urnek, 1910).

⁴ There are some notable exceptions. For instance, Kazakh *khojas* (or *qojas*) do not constitute one tribal unit with a shared genealogy, but nevertheless are imagined by Kazakhs as a distinct kinship group.

⁵ The term “Chala” is used in relation to other ethnic groups throughout Central Asia and the Volga-Ural area. For instance, an Islamized community of Bukharan Jews is known in the region as the Chalas. Chala-Kazak is also the name of a Kyrgyz tribe who populate the area around Bishkek in modern-day northern Kyrgyzstan. Historians believe that these Chala-Kazaks were originally from the Kazakh Uisin/Uisun tribe who settled among the Kyrgyz and gradually adopted the Kyrgyz language and culture. Another example is the Sart Bashkir tribe that claims descent from Bukharans who came to preach Islam among the Bashkirs. Albert Kaganovitch, “The Muslim Jews-Chalah in Central Asia,” in *Bukharan Jews. History, Language, Literature*, ed. Chana Tolmas (Tel-Aviv: M+, 2006), 111–41. Allen J. Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, Education, and the Paradox of Islamic Prestige* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), 39.

Chala-Qazaqs lived among Kazakhs, spoke the Kazakh language, and practiced Kazakh customs. As such they were effectively full members of Kazakh society, and their exclusion from the patrilineal Kazakh kinship system was virtually the only factor that prevented their acceptance as being “fully” Kazakh. However, historical sources suggest that the Kazakh kinship system was permeable, and families of Chala-Qazaq origin could be integrated as a line of a Kazakh tribe and lose their Chala status. The trajectory of Toqtarkhoja’s descendants illustrates one such case. The “Kazakhness” of former Chala-Qazaqs was evinced by their incorporation into Kazakh *shajaras*, tribal genealogies that were kept in oral and later in written forms. The emergence of distinct communities of Chala-Qazaqs in the nineteenth century marked the end of their incorporation into the Kazakh kinship system transforming Chala-Qazaqness into a permanent status and identity.

This paper examines the phenomenon of Chala-Qazaqs in the nineteenth-century Kazakh steppe. I argue that “Chala-Qazaq” appeared as a distinct category due to three developments. First, Russian expansion facilitated the migration of large numbers of Central Asian Sarts and Volga Ural Muslims⁶ into the Kazakh steppe. Second, the Russian state briefly adopted Chala Qazaq as a legal category for certain non-Kazakh Muslim migrants in the steppe region. Third, official recognition of the term led to even more intensive migration by Russian Muslims seeking Chala-Qazaq status. The social transformations made possible by Russian rule thus led to the creation of a new and widely recognized category of Muslims residing in the Kazakh steppe.

Apart from oral Kazakh sources and two interviews, all materials used in this paper can be divided into two main categories: Russian historical, ethnographic, and bureaucratic documents and Muslim historical and ethnographic works produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The single most important source for this project is *Tawarikh-i*

⁶ I use the term “Muslim(s)” as an emic category that does not reflect any ascription to religiosity or politics.

Khamsa-yi Sharqi, a 710-page historical compendium of Central Asian polities and ethnic groups published in 1910 in Kazan. The compendium's author is Qurban-ʿAli Khalidi (1846-1913), a native of the East Kazakh steppe and a Chala-Qazaq himself. Khalidi writes in the very complex Turkic language of an educated scholar by employing grammatical and spelling conventions from Ottoman Turkish, Volga-Ural Turkic, and Central Asian Turki (Chaghatai), together with extensive Persian and Arabic semantic borrowings.⁷ I primarily utilize a chapter of *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* entitled “Chala-Qazaq Baian” (“A Tale of Chala-Qazaqs”) that discusses the Chala-Qazaq communities of the Kazakh steppe focusing on communities descending from Volga-Ural Muslims.

⁷ Soviet historian and anthropologist Balkis Karmysheva defines his language as a “Turkish [Ottoman] with the elements of Tatar and Old-Uzbek (Chaghatai) languages.” Looking at another work of Khalidi known as the *Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Kazakh Steppe*, historian Allen J. Frank describes his language as “in many respects typical of the Volga-Ural region, containing vernacular Tatar elements, as well as Central Asian, and especially Ottoman, grammatical and spelling conventions.” Balkis Karmysheva, “Kazakhstanskii istorik-kraeved i etnograf Kurbanali Khalidi,” *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* 1 (1971): 100. Allen J. Frank and Mirkasym Usmanov, *An Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe: 1770-1912* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), XX.

CHAPTER 1: EARLY CHALAS: SARTS INTO KAZAKHS

The early Chala-Qazaqs emerged in the Kazakh steppe long before Russian imperial expansion into Central Asia. The earliest known cases of Chala-Qazaqs are dated from the early seventeenth century. The descendants of these individuals were eventually included into Kazakh *shajaras*, which marked their loss of Chala status and acceptance as “full” Kazakhs.

The best-known example of a Chala-Qazaq family incorporated into the Kazakh kinship system is the aforementioned case of the Bai-Jigit line of the Qara-Kerei clan of the Naiman tribe. Naiman oral history gives conflicting accounts of Toqtar-Khoja’s origin. Some narratives claim that he was a descendant of Shiban khan (who was a thirteenth son of Chinggis khan, which would make Toqtar a Chinggisid or *Töre*); others say he was from among the Uzbek Naimans; and still others assert that he was, as his name suggests, a Central Asian *khoja*.⁸ Whatever his true origin, the consensus is that he was not a Kazakh and, consequently, had no Kazakh tribal affiliation. Early twentieth-century historical sources in the Kazakh and Russian languages that record the legend do not delve into the mysteries of Toqtar-Khoja’s genealogy. These written sources simply call him a *Sart*, a generic term that was used by Kazakhs (later officially adopted by Russians)⁹ in relation to Muslim sedentary communities of Central Asia. For instance, the prominent Kazakh author Shahkarim

⁸ Central Asian *khojas* or *khawajas* claim descent from the prophet Muhammad and four Righteous Caliphs. *Khojas* were believed to have a special blessing (*barakat*) from God. They traditionally dominated the religious domain of Central Asia as Sufi *shaikhs* and Islamic scholars. On the history of Central Asian *khojas* see Ashirbek Muminov, *Rodoslovnoe drevo Mukhtara Auezova (The Genealogical Tree of Mukhtar Auezov)* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2011).

⁹ On the history of Sarts in Russian historiography see Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii. V poiskakh identichnosti* (Saint Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2007).

Khudaiberdi-ogli (1858-1931) in his work on the origin of Central Asian peoples *Turk,*

Qirghiz, Qazaq ham Khanlar Shajarasi (1911) writes:

Baiyis's [a ruler of Naimans] daughter named Maqta Abai married a Sart named Toqtar. [They] had two sons, Er-Jigit and Bai-Jigit. Er-Jigit followed the Sart and left for Turkistan. Bai-Jigit remained here [in the Kazakh steppe].¹⁰

This passage is a part of Khudaiberdi-ogli's description of the Naimans. It demonstrates that by the time when the author wrote his work, descendants of Toqtar-Khoja and his Naiman wife were firmly accepted as Kazakhs. However, it also reveals that three centuries after the inception of the Bai-Jigit Naiman line, Kazakhs still retained the memory of its origin from a Sart man. As Shahkarim Khudaiberdi-ogli was born and lived his whole life in the East Kazakh steppe populated mostly by Naimans, his account is embedded into Naiman oral history, although he may well have consulted written Naiman genealogies.

Similar stories about the origin of the Bai-Jigits appear in the writings of many Russian ethnographers who were active in eastern Kazakhstan during this period.¹¹ One of them, Vladimir Maevskii, even drew a schematic diagram of the Naiman *shajara* for an article published in 1901 in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti*. In the *shajara*, Maevskii places Bai-Jigit under Baiyis through the latter's daughter while indicating that she was "married to Toqtar."¹²

¹⁰ Khudaiberdi-ogli, *Turk, Qirghiz, Qazaq ham Khanlar Shajarasi*, 58.

¹¹ Russian ethnographer Nikolai Konshin presents an identical account in his "Zametka o proiskhozhdenii rodov srednei kirgizskoi ordy" printed in 1900 in *Pamiatnaia knizhka*, an annual publication of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Statistics Committee. The same account is given in *Zemtki po istorii i etnografii kirgiz* by Semipalatinskii podotdel Zapadno-Sibirskogo otdela Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva. Nikolai Konshin, "Zametka o proiskhozhdenii rodov srednei Kirgizskoi ordy," in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1900 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1900), 168. Boris Gerasimov, *Pervye osedlye zaselshiki Kokpektinskogo okruga. Zametki po istorii i etnografii kirgiz*, vol. 8 (Semipalatinsk: Semipalatinskii podotdel Zapadno-Sibirskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, 1914), 1.

¹² V. Maevskii, "Materialy dlia rodoslovnoi kirgiz," in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1901 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1901), 321.

As attested by Khudaiberdi-ogli and Russian ethnographers, Naiman *shajaras* demonstrate the inclusion of the Bai-Jigits into the tribe's genealogical tree. However, they also indicate that the line's integration into the larger Naiman tribe was somewhat anomalous, and suggest that Bai-Jigit himself and perhaps his immediate offspring were originally regarded as Chala-Qazaqs. In *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* (1910), Qurban-'Ali Khalidi also discusses the question of the Bai-Jigits' initial Chala-Qazaq identity. In the chapter "Chala Qazaq Baiani" Qurban-'Ali Khalidi first lays down the definition of Chala-Qazaqs. He then proceeds with some historical examples of the Chalas' inclusion into the Kazakh kinship system, noting that in such instances people nevertheless retained memories of their non-Kazakh origin.

Be it a Noghai,¹³ Sart or other person, if one of his parents is a Kazakh, and he is immersed in Kazakh [culture], his offspring is called "Chala-Qazaq" [...] The Sart tribe has mixed with local Kazakhs for years. For instance, the offspring of *Toqtar-Khoja*, Rafiq Qara Molda, and Mal Keldi, who populate a number of *volosts* and *starshinas*, are from the Sarts. [They] became a branch of Kazakhs and there is no difference left [between them] from Kazakhs, [but] first they were *Chala* and [people] have preserved the memory that their origin was Sart.¹⁴

As Qurban-'Ali Khalidi's account suggests, there were several examples of how families of non-Kazakh origin were eventually incorporated into the patrilineal Kazakh kinship system. One of these examples is again Toqtar-Khoja. Unfortunately, there are no written sources that could precisely trace how and when these Chala-Qazaqs became a part of the Kazakh tribal system. However, many oral sources that date back to the mid-eighteenth century already depict a certain descendant of Toqtar-Khoja simply as Naiman. This person is Bai-Jigit's

¹³ This term has been and is still used in Central Asia in relation to Turkic-speaking Muslims from the Volga-Urals and Siberia, modern-day Tatars and Bashkirs.

¹⁴ Qurban-'Ali Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* (Kazan: Urnek, 1910), 384.

great-grandson (and Toqtar-Khoja's great-great-grandson, accordingly), the famous batir¹⁵ Qara-Kerei Qabanbai. Qabanbai was a hero and military commander in the eighteenth-century Kazakh-Dzungar wars. All known historical sources consider him Naiman Kazakh and at all times add "Qara-Kerei"¹⁶ to his name, hence, consciously or not, reinforcing his Naiman identity and, therefore, his sense of Kazakhness. All this indicates that Toqtar-Khoja's offspring were already recognized as Naiman-Kazakhs in the time of Qabanbai's life in the late 1600s and early 1700s, less than a century after the birth of Qabanbai's great-grandfather Bai-Jigit.

The example of the Bai-Jigits demonstrates the nature of the Chala Qazaqs' incorporation into the Kazakh kinship groups at the outset of the eighteenth century. Yet one should resist the temptation to draw broad generalizations from this story. There could have been cases in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries when Chala-Qazaqs had been kept out of the tribal *shajaras*, even though sources are silent about such phenomena. The case of Toqtar-Khoja and the Bai-Jigits demonstrate that the *Chala* was a transitional status on the way to eventually become "fully" Kazakh. However, with the Russian expansion in the nineteenth century this status transformed into a permanent category that altered Chalas' integration into the Kazakh kinship system.

¹⁵ Batir/batur – a Turkic and Mongolic honorific title that means a "valiant warrior."

¹⁶ As mentioned earlier, Qara-Kerei is a major clan of Naiman Kazakhs. Its progenitor, Qara-Kerei, was the grandfather of Baiyis and, consequently, the great-great-grandfather of Bai-Jigit through his mother Maqta.

CHAPTER 2: RUSSIAN EXPANSION INTO THE EAST KAZAKH STEPPE

The Russian empire gradually extended its control over the Kazakh steppe in the early eighteenth century. As part of this expansion, Russia formed fortified lines along the northern Kazakh steppe. Many of Russia-constructed fortresses later developed into urban and commercial centers. These centers became a key factor that drove the growth of Chala-Qazaq communities in the East Kazakh steppe, which in the nineteenth century was home to a significant Chala-Qazaq population.

Although, the Russian empire had viewed Kazakhs (or at least some groups of Kazakhs) as its subjects since the 1730s, before the nineteenth century its control over Kazakh territories was nominal. Prior to the 1820s reforms proposed by Siberian governor-general, Mikhail Speransky, the Russian presence in the steppe consisted only of fortifications erected along the steppe border. Apart from their military and strategic goals, these fortifications served commercial purposes. They promoted trade relations with Kazakhs, Central Asians, and the Chinese. Many Russian fortresses in the steppe had designated merchants' courts (*menovoi dvor*) and set up caravan-sarais. In 1764 Russian authorities even started allocating the budget for special "treats" or incentives for visitors from among the Kazakhs and other Central Asians.¹⁷ By the eighteenth century, Russia developed the whole system of privileges for Central Asian merchants that boosted trade in its fortresses along the northern Kazakh steppe.¹⁸

¹⁷ Nikolai Konshin, "Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti," in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1901 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1901), 125.

¹⁸ Central Asian merchants were stripped of these privileges in the 1820s and 1830s. Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia*, 28–49.

In 1822 Russia passed the *Statute for Siberian Kirgiz*, the first major attempt to establish an administrative and political control over the East Kazakh steppe. The statute abolished the authority of khans and divided all lands into different administrative units with the largest being *okrugs* headed by *Okrug Sultans*, who governed with the help of the *Prikaz*, a council that consisted of Russian and Kazakh administrators. The Irtysh river was the borderline between internal and external *okrugs*, where Russian control had yet to be established. The majority of external *okrugs* were founded in the mid-1830s. The reforms triggered further penetration of the tsarist state into the Kazakh steppe and the growth of such urban centers as Semipalatinsk.

An important nineteenth-century economic and cultural center, Semipalatinsk (known to the local Muslim population as Semei, Semi, or Semipulat), was also initially established as a Russian stronghold in the steppe. Russians founded the fortress in eastern Kazakhstan on the right bank of the Irtysh river in 1718. A small town grew around the fort and in 1782 it became a chief center of an *uezd*. In 1852 Semipalatinsk became the capital of the newly established Semipalatinsk *oblast* attracting more administrators, military, clergy, merchants (Russian and Muslim alike), and sedentarizing Kazakhs. It assumed the role of a major trade hub in the borderlands of the Russian and Qing empires. By the late nineteenth century Semipalatinsk had also developed into one of the largest Islamic religious and educational centers in the Russian empire, boasting eleven functioning mosques and nine permanently staffed *madrasas* (Islamic educational institutions).¹⁹ Its 30,000-population made it the second largest city in the Kazakh steppe after Uralsk²⁰, and one of the largest cities in Central

¹⁹ Allen J. Frank and Mirkasym Usmanov, eds., *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban'ali Khalidi* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2001), 1.

²⁰ According to the 1897 census, Uralsk had a population of 36,000.

Asia.²¹ It was also the steppe's only urban center where Muslims (foremost Kazakhs and Tatars) made up the majority (over 55 percent) of city's residents. Incidentally, Semipalatinsk had a significant Chala-Qazaq population, while Semipalatinsk oblast was home to the majority of Chala-Qazaqs living in the Kazakh steppe.

²¹ Sources give contradictory data on the population of Semipalatinsk in the late nineteenth century. According to the Semipalatinsk Oblast Statistical Committee, in 1897 the city population constituted 30,725 people. If one adds the population of *Zarechnaia slobodka*, a district located on the left bank of the Irtysh river, that was a de-facto part of the city, but was administratively attached to it only in 1916, this number would increase to 32,135. Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1897 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1897), 136.. Meanwhile, the First All-Russian Census conducted in the same 1897 suggests that Semipalatinsk had only 26,246 people, a number that also included the population of *Zarechnaia slobodka*. Nikolai Troinitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshaia perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897: Semipalatinskaia oblast*, vol. 84 (Saint Petersburg: Tsentralnyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva vnutrennih del, 1905), 1.

CHAPTER 3: CHALA-QAZAQ AS A DISTINCT CATEGORY

Over the nineteenth century, Chala-Qazaq identity developed into a distinct social category recognized by Russian colonial administrators, Kazakhs, and the Chala-Qazaqs themselves. During this period, Chala-Qazaqs emerged as two distinct communities, one descended from Central Asian Sarts, and the other from Volga-Ural Muslims known collectively in the Kazakh steppe as the Noghais.

Many sources dated from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century mention or specifically discuss Chala-Qazaqs. These accounts range from Russian bureaucratic documents to historical works to newspaper articles in Kazakh, Tatar, Russian and other languages. Many of these sources have their own nuanced definitions of Chala-Qazaqs. However, they are all united by a common feature: they tend to treat Chala-Qazaqs as a distinct social category.

A great deal of attention that Chala-Qazaqs received from Russian administrators and ethnographers was a result of tsarist expansion into Central Asia, which facilitated substantial migrations that increased the number of Chala Qazaqs and gave the term new meaning. Russia-constructed fortifications in the Kazakh steppe developed into urban centers that attracted the migration of Muslim settlers from Russia proper and southern Central Asia. In time, many of these Muslims transformed into Chala-Qazaqs. If the early generations of Chala-Qazaqs had descended from Sarts, from the mid-nineteenth century onward the number of Chalas increased primarily at the expense of migrated Volga-Ural Muslims. The Noghai migration to Central Asia was also a direct result of the Russian empire-building.

By the late nineteenth century many Chala-Qazaq communities in the Kazakh steppe preserved a distinct “Chala” status and, therefore, stayed out of the Kazakh kinship system. The earliest distinct Chala-Qazaqs, as in the case of the Bai-Jigits line, were descendants of Central Asian Sarts. Discussing a story of Sart Chala-Qazaqs origin, Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi writes in his *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* the following:

Half of the Chala-Qazaqs descend from Sarts. Their forefathers carried on trade among Qazaqs. After the construction of the cities of Semipalatinsk and Chauchek,²² [they] were trading in these cities. Those who traded in Semipalatinsk nomadized with Qazaqs [...] in the Tarbaghatai mountains.²³ After that, their forefathers dispersed [among Qazaqs] [...] Sarts arrived [in the East Kazakh steppe] earlier than Noghais. In 1302 [1884-85] an old man Shah ‘Azim ibn Si’aqub died at age 99. He was the first Chala of the Sarts. [Therefore] the first Chala children appeared from Sarts approximately in 1200 [1785-86].²⁴

As Khalidi suggests, the first generation of distinct Chala-Qazaqs were the Kazakhified progeny of Sart merchants who nomadized and made business with Kazakhs in the East Kazakh steppe prior to the active phase of Russia’s expansion. Sart merchants were also among the first Muslim communities to permanently settle in Russia-constructed towns. In another work dedicated specifically to the history of Semipalatinsk, Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi attests that when Russians first arrived in the steppe region to set up fortifications, they met Sart traders from “Ferghana and Turkistan” trading with Kazakhs.²⁵ Soon these Sarts expanded their trade to Russian fortresses. Sart communities started building their houses in

²² Modern-day Tacheng, a county-level city in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of the Xinjiang province in China. Historically known as Chauchek/Shaushek or Chuguchak, the city in the mid-nineteenth century was an important commercial center in the borderlands of the Russian and Qing empires.

²³ A range of mountains located in eastern Kazakhstan and north-western parts of the Xinjiang province of China.

²⁴ Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi*, 384–85.

²⁵ Frank and Usmanov, *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban’ali Khalidi*, 75.

Semipalatinsk as early as the 1790s. In 1794²⁶ they constructed the first mosque in the city, known to the local Muslim population as the “Toqal masjid” or “the first Sart masjid”.²⁷ The mosque was collectively used by local Kazakhs, Sarts, and Tatars.

It is not clear if the Sarts who permanently settled in Semipalatinsk and those who, according to Khalidi, initially nomadized with Kazakhs in Tarbaghatai mountains constituted the same community of people. It appears that Khalidi sees them as two distinct groups. While he considers the nomadizing Sarts as the progenitors of the first Chala-Qazaqs, Khalidi never says the same about the Sarts residing in Semipalatinsk. In fact, he avoids using the term “Chala-Qazaq” in relation to the Sarts of Semipalatinsk at all. He consistently uses the term “Sart *masjids*” and contrasts them to the rest of the nine “non-Sart” mosques functioning in the city.²⁸

Whatever the relationship between the Sarts who nomadized in eastern Kazakhstan and those who settled in the city, by the mid-nineteenth century the Semipalatinsk Sarts were also known to Muslim authors as Chala-Qazaqs. One of the sources that notes the distinctiveness of the local Sart Chalas is the Persian-language travelogue of the Khoqandi historian Muhammad Hakim Khan. In his work *Hakim Khan*, who visited eastern Kazakhstan on his way to the *hajj* in 1824, introduces Semipalatinsk as a major city that attracts wealthy merchants from all Mawara al-Nahr.²⁹ He notes that these merchants settle in the city and

²⁶ Qurban ‘Ali Khalidi gives two possible dates for this event 1794 and 1795-96.

²⁷ The mosque had no minaret, and, apparently, the word “toqal” had to signal this. In Kazakh, “toqal” means “polled” or “hornless.” Frank and Usmanov, *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban ‘ali Khalidi*, 75.

²⁸ Khalidi had other reasons to distinguish Sart *masjids* from the rest of the city mosques. Unlike the two Sart mosques, the other nine mosques of Semipalatinsk functioned under the auspices of the Orenburg Muhammadan Spiritual Assembly (*Muftiate*). By the late nineteenth century Kazakhs were excluded from the *Muftiate*. So formally all “non-Tatar” mosques in the Kazakh Steppe (including Sart *masjids*) functioned outside of the *Muftiate* system.

²⁹ Mawara al-Nahr means in Arabic “beyond the river.” It is a geographic region between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. This term is generally used in relation to southern Central Asia.

take Kazakh women as their wives, and that “the children that are born from these mixed marriages are called Chala-Qazaqs.” Clearly perceiving Chalas-Qazaqs as a distinct community, the author mentions that “the Almighty has so generously rewarded this group [of people] (*jama’ah*) with cheerful character [...] that they know nothing except laughter.” Hakim Khan adds that he has never met people with such an open temper “neither in the other parts of the world, nor among other people (*insan*).”³⁰

Another historian from the East Kazakh steppe who discusses Sart Chalas of Semipalatinsk is Ahmad-Wali al-Simipulati. Born in Semipalatinsk in 1833 to a Tatar family, Ahmad-Wali received his initial education at a local *madrasa* and later continued his studies in Bukhara. He returned to the city in 1863 to become the imam of one of its *masjids*, which he headed until his death in 1901. In his *Kitab-i Tawarikh-i Simipulat Qal’a* (1888) Ahmad-Wali tells a story familiar to us of the origin of Chala-Qazaqs. According to him, Sart merchants from Tashkent came to Semipalatinsk where they eventually settled down and married Kazakh women. The author refers to the city district that they reside in as the “Chala-Qazaqs’ *mahalla*” and the first mosque that they constructed as the “Chala-Qazaq mosque” (i.e. the afore-mentioned *Toqal* or *the First Sart masjid*). Incidentally at the time when Ahmad-Wali was writing his work, the *Toqal masjid*’s imam was his former student, a certain Chala-Qazaq Mulla ‘Inayatallah.³¹

Sart Chala-Qazaqs were not exclusively city dwellers, as attested by Khalidi’s discussion of Sarts nomadizing with Kazakhs in the Tarbaghatai mountains. By the second

³⁰ Zhuldyz Tulibayeva, “Vostochnyi Kazakhstan nachala 19 veka v ‘Muntakhab at-Tawarikh’ Muhammada Khakimkhana,” *Arkheografiia jane derektanu ulitiq ortalighining khabarlari*, no. 3 (2014): 14. Muhammad Hakim Khan, *Muntakhab Al-Tawarikh: Selected History*, vol. II (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), 2006), 334–35.

³¹ Ahmad-Wali refrains from calling the second Sart mosque “a Chala-Qazaq masjid.” Probably, because it appeared much later in the 1850s and was sponsored not by the local Sart Chala-Qazaq community, but by the wealthy merchant from Tashkent, Mir-Qurban Bay. Frank and Usmanov, *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban’ali Khalidi*, 32.

half of the nineteenth century many Sart Chala-Qazaqs populated rural areas of Semipalatinsk oblast. Accounts suggest that their numbers were especially high in Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd* where they organized two settled agricultural villages. Observing the *uezd* in 1901, the Russian ethnographer Nikolai Konshin writes:

Here [in the Irtysh area of Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd*], many Kazakh *awils* [villages] were scattered from ancient times,³² and there even appeared two sedentary Kazakh settlements, Ahmirovo and Menovaia *slobodka*, which were founded by various migrants (*vykhodtsy*) from Central Asia, who settled nearby Ust-Kamenogorsk for commercial reasons. These migrants, with time, mixed with Kazakhs, forgot their language, and became known under the name of Chala-Qazaq.³³

Konshin's passage demonstrates the main pattern of the Sarts' migration to the Kazakh steppe following the Russian imperial expansion. Future progenitors of Sart-Chalas were attracted by trade activities in urban areas. Even when they settled in rural localities, they preferred places that were economically dependent on commercial centers and economically connected with them.

In another article dedicated to Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd*, Konshin specifically discusses the village of Ahmirovo.³⁴ Ahmirovo was located just eight *versts*³⁵ (less than two miles) from Ust-Kamenogorsk and in 1898 had a population of 346 people. It was named after a Tashkenti merchant Ahmir, who, according to local residents, was among the first "Turkestanis" to settle in the area in the late eighteenth century. Gradually, this location attracted more people from southern Central Asia who mixed with the local Kazakhs.

³² In the footnote Konshin speculates that Kazakh nomadized there since at least the 1780s.

³³ Konshin, "Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti," 154.

³⁴ Later in the text Konshin discusses another small settlement, whose population, similarly to Ahmirovo, descended from the "Tashkentis."

³⁵ *Versta* is an obsolete Russian unit of length that equals 1.0668 kilometers or 0.6629 miles.

Konshin claims that when he visited Ahmirovo all the villagers spoke the Kazakh language and even called themselves Kazakhs, although, it is not clear if other Kazakhs accepted them as such. The author concludes that there were no differences between them and “pureblooded Kazakhs.”³⁶

Similar to other towns along the Irtysh river, Ust-Kamenogorsk was originally a Russian fortress that had been founded by Russian Cossacks in 1720. Located to the east of Semipalatinsk, by the late nineteenth century it had developed into a city and *uezd* center with a population of almost nine thousand people.³⁷ Like other urban centers in the area, Ust-Kamenogorsk was home to a significant Chala-Qazaq population.

The cases of Semipalatinsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk demonstrate how trade at Russian fortresses attracted Sart merchants to settle in or near these locations and intermix with the local Kazakh families. Russia, of course, was hardly responsible for the initial emergence of the first Sart Chala-Qazaq communities, as Sarts had been trading and settling among Kazakhs long before the construction of Russian fortresses. However, it was Russian expansion into the steppe that shaped and amplified the process of “Kazakhization” of Sarts and the further development of the phenomenon of Chala-Qazaqs.

There are no accounts dating from the nineteenth century that depict the incorporation of Chalas into the Kazakh kinship system. One of the factors that explains the preservation and expansion of the Chala category in the 1800s is the substantial increase in the number of Chala-Qazaqs. The case of Sart Chalas demonstrates that many Central Asian merchants attracted by new opportunities of trade with Russia decided to relocate to the Kazakh steppe.

³⁶ Nikolai Konshin, “Po Ustkamenogorskomu uezdu. Putevye zametki,” in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1900 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1900), 210–13.

³⁷ Troinitskii, *Pervaia vseobshaia Perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897: Semipalatinskaia oblast*, 84:1.

Kazakh tribes could not absorb large numbers of newcomers, and even those Chalas who lived and nomadized with specific Kazakh tribes were still excluded from the kinship system.

Another important element in the emergence of distinct Chala-Qazaq communities is the gradual devaluation of the role of tribal identity in Kazakh society. Tribal affiliation is a key component in the nomadic pastoralist system. However, it is less relevant for residents of urban areas and sedentary agricultural communities that grew around Russia-constructed fortresses. The cases depicted above show that in the nineteenth century many Chala-Qazaqs lived in either urban or settled rural settings close to cities. Sedentarized Chala-Qazaqs (like sedentarized Kazakhs themselves) had little need to be a part of a larger “family” structure. For them, tribal affiliation played a marginal role, as their survival depended on other factors.³⁸

Finally, the official recognition of the Chala-Qazaq category by the Russian administration was another major aspect that explains the growth of this phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Like other empires, tsarist Russia strived to study and classify its subjects according to different criteria, including ethnic affiliation. At least from the 1830s, just a decade after Russia launched its active expansion into the steppe, Chala-Qazaq became an official ethnographic and, more importantly, legal category used by Russian bureaucrats in Central Asia. The “legalization” of Chala-Qazaqs was a key element that shaped the development of Chala-Qazaq communities, especially Noghai Chalas of the East Kazakh steppe.

³⁸ In the late 1890s, Konshin explored 44 Kazakh villages (either half-nomadic or completely settled) near cities of Semipalatinsk and Pavlodar in the East Kazakh steppe. Out of these 44 villages, only 19 had population from a single tribe, 15 had a dominant tribe and villagers from other tribes or ethnic groups, and 10 villages consisted of inhabitants of mixed tribal and geographical origins (e.g. one such village had 33 *meshchane*-Tatars, 28 Kazakhs of Daulet and Matai lines of the Naiman tribe, and 8 Chala-Qazaqs). Konshin, “Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti,” 178.

Noghai Chala-Qazaqs constitute another group of distinctively Chala-Qazaq communities in nineteenth-century eastern Kazakhstan. Both Sart and Noghai Chalas appeared in the Kazakh steppe as a result of Russian imperial expansion. However, unlike Sarts who were attracted by new commercial opportunities at Russia-constructed centers, early Tatars moved to Central Asia escaping the tsarist state.

The historical scholarship on Tatars in tsarist-era Central Asia tends to look at them primarily as imperial agents and intermediaries. This scholarship focuses on Tatar clerks in the steppe (scribes, interpreters, colonial officials, etc.) and the so-called “licensed” (*ukaznye*) Tatar clergy³⁹ charged with promoting the “civilizational role of Islam” and fighting the “fanatical Islam” of Bukhara and other Central Asian polities.⁴⁰ However, new scholarly works demonstrate that after the Russian conquests of the Volga-Urals and Siberia, some local groups of Muslims in their effort to escape Russian imperialism found refuge in Central Asia. In a recent article, Alfrid Bustanov examines the case of a nineteenth-century Tatar community in Khwarazm⁴¹ that opted for nonmilitant anticolonial resistance in the form of

³⁹ Those who received “license” from the Orenburg Muhammadan Spiritual Assembly (*Muftiate*), the state-sponsored Muslim religious administration in the Russian empire (1788-1917). There are also many accounts on nonlicensed Tatar clergy working in the Kazakh steppe (particularly on those working for wealthy and influential Kazakhs). These nonlicensed religious scholars came to the Kazakh steppe to work as *mullas* and teachers. Often, they relocated only temporally to earn some money and then return to their home regions. It is possible that many of those Tatar religious figures who stayed in the steppe subsequently became Chalas. Although, their migration was hardly a mass-phenomenon that had a potential to develop into distinct Chala-Qazaq communities in the steppe.

⁴⁰ Gulmira Sultangalieva, “The Russian Empire and the Intermediary Role of Tatars in Kazakhstan: The Politics of Cooperation and Rejection,” in *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 52–80. Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ Khwarazm/Khorezm is a historical region in western Central Asia to the south of the Aral Sea. Since the early sixteenth century, the region was a part of the Khiva Khanate.

hijra (migration) from Russia-controlled *dar al-harb*⁴² to Muslim-controlled *dar al-Islam*.⁴³

A central figure in this story is a religious scholar, Muhammad Sharif, who, before his ultimate relocation to Khwarazm, stayed for a short time in the Kazakh steppe, where he served as an *imam*. A story of a Tatar community in Khwarazm suggests that similar groups could emerge in the Kazakh steppe, where, it bears emphasis, imperial control was extended only after the mid-1820s. I argue that these Tatar migrants who found refuge among Kazakhs formed the core of Noghai Chala-Qazaqs in the nineteenth century.

The first Tatar communities in the Kazakh steppe relocated from Russia proper in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Qurban ‘Ali Khalidi believed that Tatars came to the steppe later than Sarts, as “Noghais took the first step toward Kazakhs [only] after 1800.”⁴⁴ However, it appears that Khalidi was writing about a specific group of Tatar migrants of which his father was a member. Other sources suggest that first Tatar communities migrated to the steppe region long before 1800. For instance, Russian administrators and ethnographers who encountered Noghai Chalas in the mid-nineteenth century asserted that “the current foreigners (*inozemtsy*) [...] who call themselves the children of Tatars or, more correctly, Chala-Qazaqs [...] are already grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the first migrants (*vykhodtsy*).”⁴⁵ Regardless of exactly when the first Tatars appeared in the Kazakh steppe, it is clear that there was already a substantial Tatar presence

⁴² Literally “the abode of war.” In the most basic sense the term indicates a territory not governed by Islam. *Dar al-harb* is contrasted to *dar al-Islam* (“the abode of Islam”), a territory where Islamic law prevails.

⁴³ Alfrid Bustanov, “The Bulghar Region as a ‘Land of Ignorance’: Anti-Colonial Discourse in Khvārazmian Connectivity,” *Journal of Persianate Studies*, no. 9 (2016): 183–204.

⁴⁴ Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi*.

⁴⁵ Bolat Zhanaev, “Chala-kazaki v 19 - nachale 20 veka: Proiskhozhdenie, rasselenie, zaniatiia,” in *Rol nomadov v formirovanii kulturnogo nasledii Kazakhstana. Nauchnye chteniia pamiati N.E.Masanova* (Almaty: Kazakhskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut po problemam kulturnogo nasledii nomadov, 2010), 278.

in the region in the immediate aftermath of the Russian imperial expansion into the Kazakh steppe.

Volga-Ural Muslims had various reasons to leave Russia proper for Central Asia. Like the Sarts, early Tatar migrant communities were primarily engaged in trade with Kazakhs. However, commerce was not the key factor that prompted their relocation to Central Asia. According to Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi, their main goal was to avoid military service in the Russian army. He emphasizes this point in his work:

Our ancestors escaped from military service by coming here [to the Kazakh steppe]. [In order to do this] they got in good with the Kazakh leaders and bribed the heads of Russians. They went through one thousand and one hardships and received freedom by becoming Kazakhs. [This is how our] grandfathers and ancestors got rid of military service.⁴⁶

Khalidi’s description of the Tatars’ motivation is also confirmed by many Russian-language sources. For instance, an 1877 geographic work, *Zemlevedenie Azii*, by Karl Ritter mentions a small town near Ayaguz that was inhabited by Chala-Qazaqs who were “a half-Asiatic rabble (*sbrod*), among whom one can meet many Russian deserters from among the Kazan and Crimean Tatars.”⁴⁷ The Russian author Kolmogorov, who stayed in the Kazakh steppe during 1851-1852, described his experiences in the article for *Severnaia Pchela*, where he noted that Chala-Qazaqs were joined “by deserters from Siberian lineal battalions (who come from the Tatars of Kazan, Orenburg, Viatka and other provinces), some deserters from lineal Cossack hosts, who know the Kazakh language, and some Russian criminals [...]”.⁴⁸ A number of Russian sources, not necessarily acknowledging the desertion of Tatars, emphasize the

⁴⁶ Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi*.

⁴⁷ Karl Ritter, *Zemlevedenie Azii: Geografiia stran vkhodiashikh v sostav Rossii ili pograniichnykh s neyu* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Bezobrazova i komp., 1877), 167.

⁴⁸ G. Kolmogorov, “Chelokazaki i tashkentsy v kirgizskikh stepiakh,” *Severnaia pchela*, June 7, 1857, 123 edition, 580–81.

“runaway” nature of Noghai Chala-Qazaqs. For instance during his stay in Chauchek/Chuguchak in 1845 then deputy-director of Russia’s Asiatic Department (sub-division of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) Nikolai Liubimov encountered a number of “our Tatars”, many of whom, he claimed, were “runaways [who] live in the steppe under the name of Chala-Qazaqs.”⁴⁹ Similarly, the Semipalatinsk-based ethnographer Konshin claimed that a Chala-Qazaq village of Bukon in Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd* was established by the descendants of “runaway Tatars.”⁵⁰ The renowned Russian geographer Petr Semenov-Tyan-Shanskii in his *Puteshestvie po Tian-Shaniu* among other things mentions his 1856 encounter with a certain Chubar-Mulla, an 80-year old head of a Tashkenti Chala-Qazaq village near Kapal in the southeast Kazakh steppe. After a long conversation, Chubar-Mulla revealed himself as a Kazan Tatar who moved to Tashkent in the 1830s and later to the Kazakh steppe with other “runaways from Russia” under the name of “Tashkenti Chala-Qazaqs.”⁵¹

When Russian administrators encountered steppe-based Chala-Qazaqs for the first time, they had to decide how to categorize these people of mixed ethnic origin. It appears that quite soon “Chala-Qazaq” was adopted as a legal category that permitted Chalas to officially reside in the Kazakh steppe as Russian subjects. Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi gives a detailed and unique account of this “legalization process” that is not found in any other Russian- or Kazakh- or Tatar-language sources. He dates the event to the 1820s when Russia was just beginning its active expansion into the Kazakh steppe:

⁴⁹ Nikolai Veselovskii, *Poezdka N.I.Liubimova v Chuguchak i Kuldzhu pod vidom kuptsa Khorosheva* (Saint Petersburg, 1909), 9.

⁵⁰ Konshin, “Po Ustkamenogorskому uezdu. Putevye zametki.”

⁵¹ Petr Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, *Puteshestvie v Tian-Shan v 1856-1857 godakh*, vol. II (Moscow: OGIZ, 1948), 57.

[C]onnections between Russia and Kazakhs strengthened. At this time Masaid agha [leader of the local Tatar community] with a *Jetisu*⁵² *Tore* [representative of Kazakh aristocracy] went to Saint Petersburg to request that the Chala-Qazaq progeny of Kazan Tatars would be now registered [...] as Kazakhs. This request was approved. [...] all Noghais without passports came to the Ayaguz divan (*prikaz*) and said “we are Chala-Qazaqs” and were included into the list.⁵³

The creation of the “Chala-Qazaq” legal category was a significant victory for the Noghais of the Kazakh steppe. Volga-Ural Muslims and Kazakhs were categorized into different social estates (*sosloviia*), which constituted the bedrock of social stratification in nineteenth-century imperial Russia.⁵⁴ Russian estates strictly regulated one’s rights and obligations before the state. Tatars were mostly assigned to the estate of peasants and to a lesser extent to *meshchane* (nonnoble city dwellers), both of which were liable for military service, the poll tax, and corporal punishment. Kazakhs, as *inorodtsy*, were exempt from such obligations and liabilities. The adoption by Russian bureaucrats of the “Chala-Qazaq” category meant that both Noghais and Kazakhs came to enjoy equal rights and obligations. This development made Noghai Chalas free from army recruitment, the main reason that forced many Tatars leave Russia proper in the first place.

The state’s recognition of Chala-Qazaqs had important legal consequences. For this reason, in 1850 the Border administration of Siberian Kazakhs adopted a new decree regulating the use of the ethnic categories. The decree criticized *okrug prikazes* that registered some of the foreigners (*inozemtsy*) residing in their *okrugs* as the “children of Tatars.” The decree reminded Russian administrators that Tatars “are subject [...] to the

⁵² Kazakh term for *Semirechie*. The term literally means “seven rivers.” It corresponds to the southeastern part of modern Kazakhstan.

⁵³ Khalidi, *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi*, 386.

⁵⁴ See more on the evolution of the *soslovie* paradigm and its particular importance in the nineteenth century Russia in Gregory L. Freeze, “The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (1986): 11–36.

recruitment obligation.” It prescribed to reject the term “children of Tatars” altogether and register the people of mixed Kazakh ethnic origin as Chala-Qazaqs.⁵⁵

In addition to legal consequences, the formal adoption of the Chala-Qazaq term had a significant impact on the dynamics of the Chala-Qazaq population in the steppe. Khalidi reveals that many people who managed to register as Chala-Qazaqs were in fact “pure Noghais” who had just recently arrived in the Kazakh steppe. Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi himself is an example of this phenomenon as he had no “Kazakh blood.” Both of his parents were born in the province of Kazan and only later moved to the Kazakh steppe.⁵⁶ Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi inherited the Chala status from his father, who in 1830 managed to obtain a document that specified his formal status of “Chala-Qazaq.”⁵⁷

Khalidi’s forged Chala-Qazaq status was by no means an isolated case. There were many other similar stories documented by contemporary sources. One of these stories features a Tatar man called Walid who came to Semipalatinsk in 1805. Upon his arrival, he decided to change his name to Yusuf, and under this new name he successfully recorded himself in the Chala-Qazaq register. In Semipalatinsk, Yusuf married a local Kazakh woman from the Kerei tribe. What is interesting about his case is that in the 1870s his son, a formal Chala-Qazaq, Ghiyas al-Din, was nomadizing in eastern Kazakhstan with the Bai-Jigits line. The same Bai-Jigits that Kazakhs two and half centuries earlier regarded as Chala-Qazaqs,

⁵⁵ Cited in Zhanaev, “Chala-kazaki v 19 - nachale 20 veka: Proiskhozhdenie, rasselenie, zaniatiia,” 279.

⁵⁶ Frank and Usmanov, *An Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe: 1770-1912*, X.

⁵⁷ Several Kazakh-language newspaper contributors paid special attention to Chala-Qazaqs, whom they considered communities of mixed ethnic and mixed tribal origin. However, Kazakh authors’ attitude toward formal Chalas such as Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi is ambiguous. In Khalidi’s obituary published in 1913 in the newspaper *Qazaq*, the historian is referred to as simply “*Imam* Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi”, and identified as the author of an important book about Kazakh history. In many other articles, *Qazaq* contributors specifically emphasize the ethnic origins of individuals they write about. In the case of Khalidi, the article’s author refrains from specifying Khalidi’s ethnic belonging. *Qazaq*, “Ichki Khabarlar,” *Qazaq* #5, 1913, 4.

but by the mid-nineteenth century had become fully Kazakhified and placed into the Naiman tribal system.⁵⁸

Russian sources also demonstrate that the Chala status was often illegally acquired and manipulated by people with no blood ties to Kazakhs. One such document claims that three Chala-Qazaqs from Ayaguz okrug turned out to be “runaway peasants from Akasheva village of Krasnoblodsk *uezd* of Penza province.”⁵⁹ These runaways were previously sentenced for theft and sent to serve in the army, but managed to escape to the Kazakh steppe and register as Chala-Qazaqs under made-up names. As a way to fight the widespread manipulations, since the mid-nineteenth century Russian administrators started to insist on the medical examination of all individuals requesting the Chala status. These procedures were to reveal possible criminals who had to have marks of corporal punishments on their bodies.⁶⁰

The confusion created by the term’s legalization eventually caught the attention of the General-governor of Western Siberia, Gustav Gasford. Expressing his dissatisfaction with the illegal use of the term, in August 1857, Gasford wrote to his subordinates:

From what I hear all kinds of vagabonds (*brodiagi*), especially among the Kazan Tatars, are moving to the Kazakh steppe, calling themselves Chala-Qazaqs and, under this name, receiving permits for free movement [...] One individual was even caught selling letterheads (*blanki*) for these permits.⁶¹

⁵⁸ In a comment to this section of Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi’s book, Allen J. Frank attributes the Bai-Jigits to the Kerei tribe. I am convinced that Khalidi was writing about the Naiman Bai-Jigits, as later in the text the author specifies that Ghiyas al-Din lived among the Mambats (or Mambets), a line that descends from Bai-Jigit’s son, Mambet. Frank and Usmanov, *An Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe: 1770-1912*, 60.

⁵⁹ Cited in Zhanaev, “Chala-kazaki v 19 - nachale 20 veka: Proiskhozhdenie, rasselenie, zaniatiia,” 291.

⁶⁰ Zhanaev, 291.

⁶¹ Cited in Zhanaev, 282.

To fight such fraud, in 1857 Gasford ordered the listing of all Chalas simply as Kazakhs and completely dropped the term “Chala-Qazaq” from official use. Despite the governor’s order, many Russian ethnographers and administrators kept using the term until the early twentieth century. Even after 1857, steppe *okrugs* continued to register some new residents as Chala-Qazaqs.

When the Russian state started abolishing many former Kazakh privileges, some formal Noghai Chala-Qazaqs expressed a desire to re-register as Tatars living in the Kazakh steppe. According to Khalidi, young Tatar men approached their elders to ask if they should “leave the status of Kazakhs.” However, the elders declined the request, citing the “hundred difficulties” and “troubles” Noghais had to go through to eventually obtain the status. This event shows how Noghais, in particular formally non-Kazakhified Chalas, valued the historical significance of the Chala-Qazaq status.

The case of Noghai Chala-Qazaqs shows how Russian empire-building in the Volga-Urals forced certain Tatar groups out of their native regions. Conscription to the Russian army was the main factor that drove this movement of people. These groups relocated to Central Asia, and many of them settled in the Kazakh steppe. The Russian expansion into Central Asia again brought into contact the Russian state with Tatars and their Chala-Qazaq progenies residing in the Kazakh steppe. This new encounter created a dilemma for both sides as the tsarist bureaucracy classified Tatars and Kazakhs into different estates entailing different obligations. Categorized predominantly as peasants, Tatars were obliged to serve in the Russian army. Kazakhs were excluded from this duty as *inorodtsy*. The legal adoption of the Chala-Qazaq category opened an opportunity for Noghai Chalas and Tatars aspiring to register as such to stay as Russian subjects in the steppe and enjoy the rights of Kazakhs.

CHAPTER 4: CHALA-QAZAQ POPULATION OF THE EAST KAZAKH STEPPE

No reliable data exists on the population of Chala-Qazaqs in the Kazakh steppe. One can argue that their presence was substantial, otherwise we would not have abundant historical accounts mentioning Chalas in the region. But how does one measure “substantial”? What follows is an attempt to reconstruct statistical figures of Chala-Qazaqs in eastern Kazakhstan with the help of diverse historical sources.

The earliest statistical data on Chala-Qazaqs is dated 1847. It concerns Chalas residing in external *okrugs* that were established just 10 to 20 years earlier within the territory of the Siberian Kirgiz oblast (later divided into Semipalatinsk and Akmolinsk oblasts). The oblast’s main administration counted 465 families of Chala-Qazaqs that wished to be registered to Kazakh *volosts* and pay taxes.⁶² In 1857, Russian administrators counted 436 Chala-Qazaq families in the two external *okrugs* of newly established Semipalatinsk *oblast*: 350 in the Ayaguz external *okrug* and 86 in Kokpekti. Three years later, in 1860, Russian ethnographer Nikolai Abramov claimed that there were 50 Chala-Qazaq families living in the city of Semipalatinsk and 626 more families living in the oblast’s three external *okrugs*, including 359 in Ayaguz and 230 in Kokpekti.

Russian statistical reports from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commonly ignore Chala-Qazaqs. A rare exception is the 1895 annual publication of the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee that mentions 1,173 Chala-Qazaqs living in the whole oblast (clearly an understated number). Another exception is the 1899 *Pamiatnaia knizhka*

⁶² Cited in Zhanaev, 279.

published by the oblast administration that describes four Chala-Qazaq villages in Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd* with a total of 2,079 residents.⁶³

There are several reasons why Chala-Qazaqs are largely absent from statistical data collected by Russian colonial institutions. In addition to the Western Siberian governor's decree to drop the term and some obvious reasons such as complicated mixed ethnic origin, the absence of such information on Chala-Qazaqs can be explained by the nature of the statistical methodology used in Russia. In many instances, tsarist administrators attributed an individual's ethnic affiliation to language. Since there was no Chala-Qazaq language, this category was largely omitted in most of the statistical data. For instance, the 1897 imperial census unsurprisingly registers no Chala-Qazaqs in Semipalatinsk (or anywhere else in the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia). However, we know that in the late nineteenth century the city had a viable Chala-Qazaq community. Evidently, census takers subsumed them within other categories, foremost among the "speakers of Kazakh," as Kazakh was the first language for most of the Chalas. A great number of sources attest that many statistical documents indeed counted Kazakhs and Chala-Qazaqs together.⁶⁴

Another Russian statistical category that accommodated Chala-Qazaqs was that of "speakers of Tatar." Owing to the importance of estates (*soslovie*) attributed by the tsarist state, many Russian census reports give a detailed layout of population distributed over official estates. This statistical data can help us in reconstructing the way some Chala-Qazaqs

⁶³ Semipalatinskii oblastnoi statisticheskii komitet, *Semipalatinskii oblastnoi statisticheskii komitet za 1894 god* (Semipalatinsk: Semipalatinskii oblastnoi statisticheskii komitet, 1895), 14. Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1899 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1899), 72.

⁶⁴ Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Obzor Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1899 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1900), 3. Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Obzor Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1900 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1901), 3. Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Obzor Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1901 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1902), 3.

ended up in the category of Tatars. In Semipalatinsk oblast, unsurprisingly, the majority of the registered 9,940 Tatar-speakers belonged to the estates of *meshchane* (6,042 people) or peasants (1,945) with a significant number (521) of merchants.⁶⁵ As the Russian states categorized Kazakh-speakers (and, consequently, most Chala-Qazaqs) predominantly as *inorodtsy*,⁶⁶ one can consider all Tatar-speakers of the *inorodtsy* estate as Chala-Qazaqs. By reversing this logic, one can assume that Tatar-speakers from all other non-*inorodtsy* estates excluded Chala-Qazaqs. This assumption, however, contradicts contemporary ethnographic accounts. These sources assert that at least some non-*inorodtsy* Tatars constituted Chala-Qazaqs. For instance, ethnographer Konshin mentions his encounter with Kazakhified (culturally and partially linguistically) Tatar families who lived in a Kazakh *awil*, but were nevertheless registered as *meshchane* and thus were liable for military service.⁶⁷ This suggests that the Tatar *meshchane* estate did include some de-facto Noghai Chala-Qazaqs, even though from the legal perspective they were neither Kazakh nor Chala-Qazaq.

Meanwhile, the largest group of Tatar-speakers that in 1897 incorporated Chala-Qazaqs is indeed *inorodtsy*,⁶⁸ a legal category used in relation to indigenous non-European ethnic groups in the Russian empire. The fact that census takers listed 1,321 Tatar speakers of Semipalatinsk oblast as *inorodtsy* must mean that these people were not legally recognized as “Tatars.” An obvious explanation is that they were Chala-Qazaqs who either spoke the Tatar

⁶⁵ Troinitskii, *Pervaia vseobshaia perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897: Semipalatinskaia oblast*, 84:136–43.

⁶⁶ In Semipalatinsk oblast more than 99.7 percent of Kazakh-speakers were registered as *inorodtsy*.

⁶⁷ These six Tatar-*meshchane* families (of 33 individuals) were registered in the town of Kokpekti. The 1897 statistical data from Kokpekti indicates only a single *meshchanin* Kazakh-speaker and 315 speakers of Tatar registered in the town. Troinitskii, *Pervaia vseobshaia perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897: Semipalatinskaia oblast*, 84:164. Konshin, “Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti,” 179.

⁶⁸ Including 380 *inorodtsy* out of 4,157 Tatar population of the city of Semipalatinsk and 289 *inorodtsy* out of 447 Tatars of Ust-Kamenogorsk *uezd* known for having a significant Chala-Qazaq population.

language or simply had the Tatar origin. Russian language accounts confirm that by the early twentieth century some Chala-Qazaq families had indeed preserved Tatar language and even the Tatar “way of life.”⁶⁹ Those could have been the former “legal Chala-Qazaqs” (such as Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi’s family) who seized the opportunity to register in the Kazakh steppe in the 1820s and 1830s and enjoy the “rights” of Kazakhs.

Similarly, the “speakers of Sart” category, possibly in their entirety, comprised Chala-Qazaqs.⁷⁰ By the late nineteenth century Sart merchants, who had migrated to the steppe a century earlier, intermixed with Kazakhs and adopted their language or, in other words, became Chala-Qazaqs. It is possible that some of their descendants had preserved the “Sart language” (whatever this term meant for Russian census takers), but there is simply no evidence to support this claim. One could assume that there were some recently relocated Sart merchants residing in Semipalatinsk, who still would have spoken the “Sart language” and by definition could not qualify as Chala-Qazaqs. However, this logical assumption goes against the 1897 census data that records no merchants among all 495 Sarts living in the oblast (including 123 Sarts registered in the city of Semipalatinsk). The absence of merchants among the once thriving community of Sart Chalas is confirmed by both Ahmad-Wali al-Simpulati and Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi. The two authors note that by the late nineteenth century some wealthy merchant “Sart Chala-Qazaq” families had moved to Russia or China, while those who stayed became impoverished.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Semipalatinskoe Oblastnoe Pravlenie, *Obzor Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1904 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1905), 14. Semipalatinskoe oblastnoe pravlenie, *Obzor Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1910 god* (Semipalatinsk: Tipografiia Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1911), 14.

⁷⁰ Perhaps with the exception of the Sarts who were “subjects of foreign countries”. In 1897, only 64 out of 495 Sarts living in Semipalatinsk oblast were “foreigners.” Troinitskii, *Pervaia vseobshaia perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897: Semipalatinskaia oblast*, 84:161.

⁷¹ Frank and Usmanov, *Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk: Two Manuscripts by Ahmad-Wali al-Qazani and Qurban’ali Khalidi*, 32.

After the Bolshevik revolution, the new Soviet state rejected the term Chala-Qazaq altogether and the term completely disappeared from any statistical or historiographical materials. Today many descendants of Chala-Qazaqs in Eastern Kazakhstan, foremost Noghai Chalas, preserve the memory of their non-Kazakh origin. However, they prefer to avoid the term “Chala-Qazaq” and simply identify themselves as Kazakhs.

CONCLUSION

Prior to the early nineteenth century Chala-Qazaqs presented a limited phenomenon in the Kazakh steppe. The early Chala-Qazaqs could integrate into the Kazakh kinship system and drop the Chala status altogether. However, the eastern expansion of the Russian empire altered the development of this phenomenon. On the one hand, Russian expansion forced the future progenitors of Noghai Chalas from their native locations to Central Asia; on the other, Russia-constructed towns in the Kazakh steppe attracted Sart merchants who became the progenitors of Sart Chalas. The legal adoption of the term opened the opportunity for Noghai Chalas to embrace Russian rule and stay in the Kazakh steppe. It also shifted the ethnic and cultural character of the term to political and legal grounds, thus, creating a layer of legally “Chala,” but culturally non-Kazakh communities in the Kazakh steppe.

In modern-day Kazakhstan, the historical meaning of the term “Chala-Qazaq” is largely forgotten. Just over a century ago, it served to denote people of non-Kazakh origin who spoke Kazakh and practiced Kazakh customs. Ironically, at the present time the term has transformed to indicate practically the opposite social phenomenon. Known in modern-day Kazakhstan as “shala-Qazaq,”⁷² the term has developed into a derogatory name used in relation to ethnic Kazakhs who have limited or no knowledge of the Kazakh language (in other words “Russified” Kazakhs). Shala-Qazaqs are allegedly alienated from genuine Kazakh culture and traditions. They are contrasted with “naghiz Qazaqs” (true or genuine Kazakhs), who presumably managed to maintain the “purity” of Kazakh culture and the

⁷² “Shala” reflects the correct modern-day vernacular Kazakh pronunciation of the term. The term “Chala” was used in Arabic-script writings of Turkic-language (Kazakh, Tatar, Chaghatai, etc.) authors prior to the transfer of their alphabets from Arabic to Latin in the 1920s and eventually to the Russian Cyrillic script in 1939-1940.

Kazakh language. The emergence of modern shala-Qazaqs as a social category has its roots in the second half of the twentieth century. This process is associated with rapid urbanization in Soviet Kazakhstan, state promotion of the Russian language, and disregard for the Kazakh language.

Perhaps this negative connotation of the term is the main reason why some Kazakhified descendants of Noghai Chala-Qazaqs still living in eastern Kazakhstan prefer to ignore this term and describe themselves simply as Kazakhs.⁷³ Interestingly enough, the term “Sart” enjoys a similar negative association among Kazakhs (and other Central Asians), who historically perceived it in a pejorative light.⁷⁴ This negative perception of both terms explains why the 1992 Kazakh translation of Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi’s *Tawarikh-i Khamsa-yi Sharqi* completely drops both names in the part of the book that discusses the story of Toqtar-Khoja and the Bai-Jigits.⁷⁵ Notably, today certain descendants of Bai-Jigit using, among other accounts, the work of Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi claim lineage to Central Asian *khojas*, a status that bears significance for many traditional Kazakhs in the context of rapid re-Islamization processes in the modern-day Central Asia.⁷⁶ Notwithstanding the claims, these Bai-Jigits categorically deny any affiliation to Chala-Qazaqs and Sarts alike.

Historical Chala-Qazaqs present a fascinating case that exposes ethnic processes in pre-colonial and colonial settings. It also illuminates many aspects of Russian empire-

⁷³ Malika T., Personal interview with a descendant of Noghai Chala-Qazaqs from eastern Kazakhstan, July 29, 2018.

⁷⁴ The term Sart was an official ethnic category adopted in the Russian empire, but contested by some Central Asian intellectuals and certain representatives of those who were regarded as “Sarts.” The Soviet Union rejected the term altogether “dissolving” Sarts among the modern-day Uzbeks and Tajiks.

⁷⁵ Kazakhs have historically perceived “Sart” as a derogatory term. Instead, Kazakh translators of Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi’s work opted for the term “Turkistani” (*Turkistandiq*).

⁷⁶ Anthropologist Ulan Bigozhin notes that today many Bai-Jigits living in the Tarbaghatai region of Eastern Kazakhstan tend to “accept” their *khoja* heritage, without, however, denouncing their affiliation to Naimans. Ulan Bigozhin, Personal communication., November 6, 2018.

building, highlighting particularly how state policy can cause a chain of reactions that affects political, economic, legal, religious, and ethnic processes in the empire's domains. In addition, this phenomenon illustrates the agency of Muslims under the Russian rule. These Muslims themselves made a decision to either engage or disengage with the tsarist state. When opting for the latter, they tried to seize opportunities offered by the imperial expansion. Muslims established commercial relationships with Russians and used the market system set up at Russia-constructed towns in the Kazakh steppe. They also tried to manipulate the established classification of ethnicities adopted in Russia and the legal system that regulated duties and rights of different ethnic groups. Lastly, the Chala-Qazaq phenomenon demonstrates the high mobility⁷⁷ and close interconnection between predominantly Turkic-speaking and Muslim areas of the Russian empire and Central Asia.

⁷⁷ The Qurban-‘Ali Khalidi’s family story is a curious case of mobility in the region. According to his family legend, his ancestor, Turkman Baba, moved to the Volga region in the middle of the seventeenth century from the Khiva area in southwestern Central Asia. Both of his parents were ethnic Noghais (Tatars) who moved to the Kazakh steppe from the Kazan province in Russia. Khalidi himself was born in 1846 in the Ayaguz region of the East Kazakh steppe with the formal status of Chala-Qazaq. In 1874 Khalidi moved to the frontier town of Chauchek/Chuguchak (in the modern-day China’s province of Xinjiang) to become an *imam* at a local mosque. He headed this mosque until his death in 1913. Frank and Usmanov, *An Islamic Biographical Dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe: 1770-1912*, X-XII.

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